Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Pinedale Region

February 2017 Newsletter

Tough Winter

(Left) Thirteen dead mule deer fawns were found at these hay bales near Labarge. (Above) Deer continue to feed on the hay even though their stomachs are not set up to extract the necessary nutrients from it to survive. More will likely starve with a belly full of hay.

After a couple of relatively mild winters, western Wyoming is getting a winter that will undoubtedly have an impact on big game herds, especially mule deer and pronghorn. The combination of very cold temperatures, deep snow and a couple thaw and refreezing cycles has made it very difficult for animals to move or find forage. Consequently, Game and Fish personnel are addressing a high number of private land damage situations and documenting a growing number of dead animals, especially fawns.

"Like many across the state, we at Game and Fish are concerned when big game start dying mid-winter because there are several more months of potentially harsh weather to come," said Chief of the Wildlife Division, Brian Nesvik. "In a situation like this we review the science related to options to determine if there is a way to mitigate the big game deaths." Emergency feeding of deer is one idea that has come up as a way to stave off winter losses, but it has not been documented as a an effective management practice in minimizing winter mortality for large populations of deer or antelope.

The Department held an online public meeting on Feb. 8 to take questions and discuss existing research on options such as emergency feeding of deer and antelope or removing coyotes that can prey on deer and pronghorn when they are vulnerable during the winter. A video recording of the meeting is available at https://wgfd.wyo.gov/winter2017. The Department has determined it would not be feasible or effective to try to feed these species.

(Left and Right) Moose trying to survive the harsh winter at a rancher's haystack in Sublette County.

Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

February 2017

Winter Elk Counts Conducted

Pinedale Wildlife Biologist Dean Clause and South Pinedale Game warden Jordan Kraft count elk at the Fall Creek Feedground southeast of Pinedale.

Wildlife biologists and game wardens count big game animals at different times of year based on when they are most visible and can be classified as males, females and juveniles. This gives managers a picture of not only how many animals there are, but how the population is trending: increasing, stable or decreasing. This information helps managers design hunting seasons that will keep the population at the established population objective. Winter is the best time to count and classify most big game, especially elk, since most elk in the Pinedale and Jackson regions attend winter feedgrounds, making them relatively easy to count. All of the game wardens, biologists and other regional personnel chip in to count the elk as it is a big job.

While the results of regional elk herd counts have not been completed yet, Pinedale wildlife managers will present all the current big game numbers along with their proposed hunting seasons at an upcoming public meeting scheduled for 6-8pm, **March 20th at the Pinedale Game and Fish office.**

Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

February 2017

First Time Bighorn Sheep Captures

Several regional wildlife personnel joined up with Game and Fish lab personnel from Laramie to continue a statewide disease surveillance effort in bighorn sheep. However, this is the first year sheep have been captured for such in the Darby Mountain herd in the Wyoming Range.

A total of eight bighorn sheep, six ewes and two young rams, were captured to study movements as well as test for respiratory diseases and assess the overall health of the herd. The sheep were captured via aerial netting on Fish Creek Mountain and ferried to waiting biologists at the Middle Piney snowmobile parking lot. A variety of biological samples were to test for various respiratory diseases common to bighorn sheep. All the sheep were then fitted with GPS collars to track there movements over the next two years to determine important habitat areas and if there is interchange between the Darby Mountain herd and the southern portion (Ramshorn Mountain area) of the Jackson Herd.

A professional wildlife capture crew brings in a pair of bighorn sheep captured on Fish Creek Mountain in the Wyoming Range to be tested for disease and fitted with GPS collars.

Wyoming Game and Fish biologists and disease specialists collect biological samples from bighorn sheep captured in the Wyoming Range and ferried to the Middle Piney snowmobile parking lot.

Movin' Snow

This year's heavy snow and drifting has hampered elk feeders' ability to load haysleds and feed the elk. Consequently, Pinedale Habitat & Access personnel have had to spend several days moving snow from around horse corrals and haysheds at a number of area feedgrounds to allow the feeding of elk.

Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

February 2017

Elk Ecology Research Continues

Jackson and Pinedale personnel in the Game and Fish Department's Brucellosis-Feedgrounds-Habitat (BFH) program darted elk on the Camp Creek feedground near Hoback Junction south of Jackson. Adult cow elk were tranquilized from the hay sled and fitted with GPS collars to document fine-scale movements and Vaginal Implant Transmitters to identify elk parturition, or calving, areas.

In addition, blood samples were collected to continue long-term brucellosis seroprevalence trend data. This information is also useful for developing elk seasonal range maps, determining areas of high brucellosis transmission risk and providing land managers with additional information to make better resource management decisions.

The collars are continually recovered and refurbished with new batteries and drop-off mechanisms and redeployed to continue to collect GPS data on elk. The Game and Fish Department's BFH program personnel, with collaborators from Iowa State University and the University of Wyoming, have collected a total of over 600 years of GPS collar data from elk captured on 20 feedgrounds and seven native winter range sites adjacent to feedgrounds from 2007 to 2017.

Photos: (Above left) BFH Biologist Ben Wise prepares to shoot a tranquilizer dart in a cow elk. (Above right) BFH Biologist Jared Rogerson performs an ultrasound to ensure a cow elk is pregnant before inserting a Vaginal Implant Transmitter. (Left) A cow elk receives a shot of antibiotic and a GPS collar (Lower right) A cow elk scrambles to it's feet after the reversal drug takes effect.

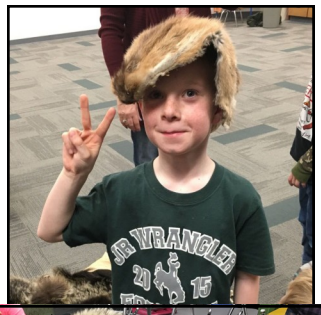
Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

February 2017

From the Front Desk…

Pinedale Game and Fish Office Managers Lori Johnson and Kristen Draney remind spring black bear hunters that the time to renew their bait sites is March 1-20. After that new bait sites can be registered starting April 1.

Getting WILD



Regional Information & Education Specialist Mark Gocke taught a wildlife ecology and habitat program to this wild group of Pinedale Elementary students.

Fish Medicine

Fish Culturists at the Daniel Fish Hatchery treated their Colorado River cutthroat brood fish with TM200 for Pseudomonas disease. They have started using a gelatin to coat the feed rather than oil and so far it is working great.

Pinedale Region Monthly Newsletter

February 2017

Photo Page...

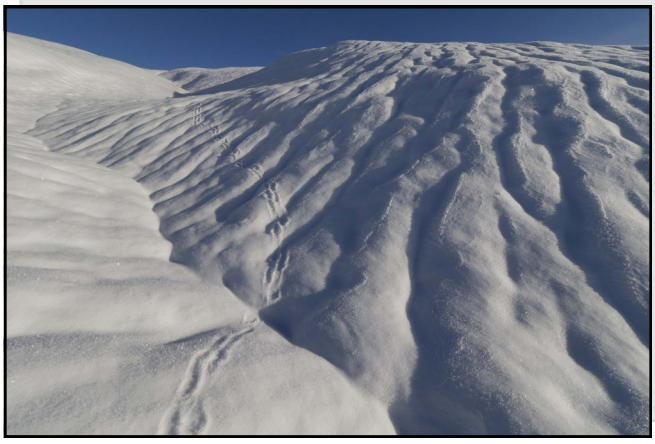
Photos taken by Jackson-Pinedale Regional Information and Education Specialist Mark Gocke in the Pinedale Region over the past month.

Morning fog near Hoback Rim.

A moose conserves energy amidst the deep snow along the Hoback River near Bondurant.

A group of pronghorn find some sage above the snow south of Boulder.

A wolf crests the ridge near Bondurant.



Tracks cross a small drainage in the snow near Bondurant.

Mule deer line out heading south on the Pinedale Mesa at sunset.